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Sometimes Medicine Is A Good Dose Of Knowledge



TLC Tips For Eczema And Psoriasis

Don't let winter wreak havoc on your skin condition. Here are the soothing solutions you need to keep eczema and psoriasis in check.



Winter isn't nice to skin. Its cold, dry air robs your largest organ of moisture, leaving it dehydrated and irritated. The drying action of the season is especially tough on eczema- and psoriasis-prone skin, causing the disorders to act up. While frigid temperatures can send your eczema and psoriasis into a tizzy, so can many other factors. Keep reading for what you need to know about these skin conditions, including what sets them off and how you can temper and prevent their flare-ups.

Understanding atopic eczema

Long-term inflammation of the skin – that's eczema. There are several types of the skin condition, but atopic eczema (also called atopic dermatitis) is the most common. Roughly 17 percent of Canadians suffer with atopic eczema at some point in their lives, reports the Canadian Dermatology Association. It first appears in early childhood and kids often suffer with it into their teens, at which time many outgrow it. However, not everyone is that fortunate. Dr. Ronald Vender, a dermatologist in Hamilton, Ont., and associate clinical professor of medicine at McMaster University, estimates that 1/3 of people continue to battle eczema into adulthood.

The signs and symptoms come and go, as the disorder alternates between periods of remission and flare-ups. When eczema acts up, it can be intensely itchy. Areas of your skin also rash and get dry, red and swollen. In bad cases, you might also experience scaling and crusting. "It tends to involve areas like the face and creases of the arms and legs, but it can occur other places as well," says Dr. Peter Vignjevic, a dermatologist in Hamilton, Ont., and assistant professor of dermatology at McMaster University.

What sets off an eczema episode is different for everyone, but there are some common triggers. "Things like stress, cold and dry weather, exposure to hot water, over-washing of hands, working with chemicals – such as oils, greases, strong soaps and detergents – and getting them on your skin aggravate eczema," says Vignjevic. Identifying all of your triggers isn't simple – it can often be impossible. Similarly, the underlying or root causes of eczema – why you get it in the first place – are unclear. "It is likely due to a barrier defect in the skin of individuals suffering from the disorder," says Vender. As well, there appears to be a genetic component. According to the American Academy of Dermatology, eczema seems to be more popular in people with a family history of allergies.

Understanding plaque psoriasis

Psoriasis is a chronic, recurrent skin disorder that approximately 1 million Canadians suffer with, reports the Canadian Dermatology Association. Genetics seem to play a role in determining whether or not you'll contend with psoriasis. You can develop it at any age, though it tends to show up sometime in your teens or 20s. There are different forms, but plaque psoriasis is the most common. It begins with little red bumps that eventually become larger red, silvery or greyish thick scaly patches, the tops of which flakes easily and

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frequently, says the Canadian Dermatology Association.

Like eczema, psoriasis goes through times of remission and flare-ups. When your psoriasis is active, the scales form and they may get itchy and be painful. Sometimes they can crack and bleed. "Most commonly, people get the really thick scaly areas on their elbows, knees, scalp and lower back," says Vignjevic. Psoriasis can also target your nails and appear on your palms and soles of your feet and on or around your genitals. What brings on an episode? Things like stress, infections, certain medications and cold, dry weather top the list of typical triggers.

While there's no clear cause of psoriasis, your immune system shoulders a chunk of responsibility. Simply put (it's a complicated process), an abnormal immune reaction triggers inflammation in the skin, and the inflammation makes the skin grow too fast – every three to four days (normally, skin regenerates every 28 days), says the Canadian Dermatology Association. Your body can't get rid of the excess skin quickly enough, so it builds up and forms plaques. This unusual immune response may also lead to psoriatic arthritis, where joints (most often the fingers and toes) are stiff and painful. About 30 percent of psoriasis sufferers get psoriatic arthritis.

TLC tips

There's no cure for eczema or psoriasis, but there are steps you can to help prevent or minimize flare-ups. The most crucial thing is to be diagnosed by a dermatologist and to follow the treatment plan they develop for your condition. As well, caring for your skin properly and avoiding triggers (the ones you're aware of) are paramount in managing eczema or psoriasis.

When it comes to skincare, bathing and moisturizing are hugely beneficial for both disorders. Eczemic skin is very dry and loses more water than normal, says Vignjevic, so you have to frequently hydrate it. Meanwhile, keeping psoriasis-afflicted skin hydrated helps reduce inflammation and scaling and helps prevent cracking, according to the American Academy of Dermatology. Here how's to give your skin the tender loving care it needs.

Bathing: Since hot water dries out skin, which aggravates both conditions, bathe in lukewarm water. Baths are preferable to showers, as soaking exposes your skin to water for longer. When running your bath, add a capful of emulsifying oil, such as Rexall Moisturizing Bath Oil, and swish it around. The oil, says Vignjevic, helps seal the water into your skin. (It makes the tub slippery, so be careful.) Tenderly cleanse (no scrubbing or pulling!) with a mild, soap-free, fragrance-free cleanser, such as Cetaphil Gentle Skin Cleanser. (Perfumed products can upset eczema and psoriasis.) Stay in the tub for 5 to 10 minutes, then gingerly pat your skin down with a towel, ensuring that your skin stays damp.

Moisturizing: Immediately after your bath, apply a fragrance-free moisturizer, such as Spectro EczemaCare Intense Rehydration Cream, to your still-damp skin. This helps lock in the water, so your skin is nicely hydrated. Do this bathing and moisturizing ritual morning and night, especially in the cold months. As well, apply moisturizer during the day whenever you need to.

Taking care of your skin is a must in controlling eczema and psoriasis, as is steering clear of your known triggers. Here are a few more pointers that can help prevent flare-ups.

Eczema

1. Wear cotton clothes. Wool and other fabrics can irritate the skin.
2. Avoid perfumed products, including detergents and soaps.
3. When you do laundry, rinse your clothes twice to remove any lingering detergents, which may agitate your skin.
4. Use a humidifier at home to prevent the air from getting too dry.
5. Try to determine any possible allergies that may be contributing to your eczema. Ask your dermatologist to perform an allergy patch test.

Psoriasis

1. If you smoke, quit. Research indicates that smoking may lead to flare-ups.
2. Wear cotton clothing, as other fabrics can irritate the skin.
3. If you enjoy imbibing a lot, cut back on the amount you drink. Consuming a lot of alcohol may encourage psoriasis to act up.
4. Follow the principles of healthy living. Eat a nutritious, balanced diet, exercise and get adequate rest. This helps keep your immune system strong, making you less vulnerable to infections that can ignite flare-ups, and keeps stress in check – a common psoriasis trigger.

**Tips from the American Academy of Dermatology*

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